



1917

Speech Delivered by Attorney General Langer: The Record Of The First State Nonpartisan Administration In The World

William Langer
State of North Dakota

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/langer-papers>

Recommended Citation

Langer, William, "Speech Delivered by Attorney General Langer: The Record Of The First State Nonpartisan Administration In The World" (1917). *William Langer Papers*. 90.
<https://commons.und.edu/langer-papers/90>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections at UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in William Langer Papers by an authorized administrator of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact und.common@library.und.edu.

THE RECORD OF THE FIRST STATE NONPARTISAN
ADMINISTRATION IN THE WORLD.

Being a Speech delivered by William Langer,
Attorney General of North Dakota. The
Facts and figures herein contained are vouched
for by Mr. Langer, and the record at Bismarck
shows them to be correct.

Friends :

The Equity, under the guidance of George P. Loftus, whose early decease we all lament so greatly, contributed more to democratic principals in North Dakota, than any other one cause. The spectacle of this fearless, farsighted, intrepid man, fighting the enemies of good government, corrupt politicians, self-seeking, selfish, soulless, entrenched wealth, at first compelled the attention of the average North Dakota common man and gradually absorbed his entire interest until finally the farmers of this state were like the Knights of Old - ready to fight for their welfare, their liberty, and for all the many things to which they are entitled in a free country.

The Equity builded well; it adopted conservative ways of doing business; its organization was along conservative lines, and during the time it was guided by Loftus and his assistants it drew to it the Farmers Union and the Grange.

As the forces representing the Equity, the Grange and Farmers Union co-mingled they were looking for leadership - the times demanded strong men. They came. The Non-partisan League moulded the forces of the Equity, the Farmers Union and the Grange into a mighty political power and gave to the people of North Dakota a

great state administration, and presented to the United States of America a sample of democratic state government by democratic men, believing in democratic principles.

What is the record of the state administration ? The Devils Lake Journal, a few days ago, had an article entitled, " Let No One be Deceived." Our friend, John Bloom, when he wrote that editorial hit upon a happy phrase, and I say to you today LET NO ONE BE DECEIVED by the lying, hypocritical, contemptable, weak spined, rotten, diseased, newspapers so well typified by the Bismarck Tribune and the Grand Forks Herald.

When the legislature and the state officers elected from the ranks of the plain people, by the farmers and common people of the state, met at Bismarck and rented the Northwest Hotel, the cry went out, "The Non-partisan League is owned by the Northern Pacific Railway Company", and immediately it was stated how much Townley had received, how the Non-partisan leaders had betrayed the farmers and how Alex McKenzie had pulled off another great coup d'etat.

In spite of House Bill 298, regulating railroad rates, plus the full crew bill practically unanimously supported by the Non-partisan League members in the legislature and the other bills introduced to help labor, Big Business interests kept up the insidious rumor - The Non-partisan League has fooled the farmer, it is controlled by McKenzie - day and night, in lightness and in darkness the rumor was circulated.

The Senate, under the leadership of a few men willing to jeopardize the interests of the state, to get revenge in politics,

killed the progressive measures, and so it was not until the State Board of Equalization elected by the farmers and common people met that the true facts could be demonstrated. The State Board of Equalization, composed of the Governor, the Attorney General, the State Auditor, the Commissioner of Agriculture and Labor, and the State Treasurer, raised the taxes of some of Mr. McKenzie's interests and allied interests as follows:

	1916	1917
The Northern Pacific Railroad Co., taxed \$	16,132,997 -	\$ 24,388,133
The Great Northern Railroad Co.,	" 20,152,048 -	28,317,247
The Soo Railroad Company,	" 10,759,145 -	12,481,830
The Milwaukee Railroad Co.,	" 3,494,698 -	4,277,058

After the State Administration raised the taxes of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company 51.17%, the "N. P." sign was taken off the Non-partisan League forever, and immediately we find the attorneys for the railroad company bringing an action in the United States Court claiming that the administration is unfair to them, and asking that their taxes be reduced. Then we find the Great Northern doing the same thing, and finally they are joined by the Soo. In the railroad suits along over \$800,00 in cash, as taxes is involved. For once the Northern Pacific and Great Northern are assessed on their true basis, and the state administration is entitled to the credit among the common people and to the discredit among the Big Business interests.

The express companies were all raised over 100%, and they are paying it without a murmur; the Pullman Company was raised over 300% and they are not fighting in court, or any other place.

The record of the state administration must be judged by what has been accomplished. Insurance Commissioner, Olsness, is making a tremendous success of the State Bonding Act. Shortly

after the Supreme Court of the United States threw the bonding case out for lack of jurisdiction, on the able and thorough brief of Assistant Attorney General, H. A. Bronson, Commissioner Olsness at once started out to save to the people of North Dakota the sum of \$115,000 for every biennial period. The work of Senator Ellingson, of course, is primarily responsible for the bonding law, but unless it was efficiently administered the benefits derived would be trifling. Under Olsness' administration of the law, every school district, village, city, township, town and city officer must, if he wishes the municipality to pay for the bond, take it out in the state bonding department. In the biennial period it is estimated that it would amount to \$115,000. As soon as the fund reaches \$100,00 it is pro rated back to the different municipalities. Under the law Olsness can only receive \$1500. for the administration of the law, and the fact that he is able to get on with that small expense is remarkable. The private Bonding companies are fighting the act desperately and are doing what they can to discredit its operations about the state.

We need reform in laws governing insurance corporations. As soon as these come Mr. Olsness will be able to administer his office even more efficiently.

You men all remember the great fight put up against the State Tax Commission. Comparatively a few months ago, there was talk of abolishing it, but all the while the Tax Commission was backing up the common men of this state and fighting for their interests. They assisted me materially when I was State's Attorney of Morton County in a case brought by the Northern Pacific Rail-

road Company against Morton County, which case according to stipulated facts, and in the written opinion of Judge Goss, involved \$30,000,000 worth of property. Over two thousand elevator sites, hundreds of lumber yards, electric light, oil tank, and other sites were involved and the case was won. This year their recommendations in regard to Railroad Companies, telephone and telegraph, and other public service corporations have been of immense value. As a result of their recommendations, an additional tax of \$900,00 was levied against public service corporations. When the commission was organized the banks of the state were getting away with an exemption of taxable property of five per cent of their loans and discounts. They were also exempting land located outside of the state. The Commission put a stop to this and added approximately \$200,00 annually to the income of the state. The Commission has made an exhaustive study of the return on capital invested in farm lands, both in North Dakota, and throughout the United States generally, and are advocating that all property be assessed in proportion to its ability to pay to that of its income. If carried out, this will mean a re-adjustment of the tax burden so that real estate will bear no more than its portinate share. The Tax Commission recommended to the legislative assembly law providing for the assessment of money and credits, not only of all citizens of the state, but of non-residents who transact business within the state. These laws reach the International Harvester Company, all big machinery companies generally, and all foreign corporations doing business in the state, but having little property here. These laws probably involve \$300,000,000 of taxable property. The Commission has assisted the Attorney General in sustaining the

tax laws when attacked. For instance, Commissioner F. E. Packard, recently argued and briefed the money and credits and situs laws in the supreme court and defended the motor vehicle license law and has been of great assistance to the attorney general in preparing for trial, the railroad tax cases, which involve the \$800,000 of additional tax levied against these corporations.

When this present state administration assumed office, there were 220 creameries in the state, but only 56 of them were in actual operation. When the constitution of this state was adopted, it was according to the word some of the members of the constitutional convention first submitted to Jim Hill before it was adopted. Mr. Hill naturally figured that he could make more money by hauling cream from Bismarck to St. Paul than he could by hauling cream from Bismarck to Fargo, and the laws we have had since that have been more or less founded on that plan. But no sooner had the present railroad commission taken office than an action was instituted by the Attorney General's office attacking the cream rates here in this state. At the hearing at Grand Forks and Minot, it was conclusively shown that the express companies were paying greater commissions to depot agents here to ship cream out of the state, than to those who ship it to a point within the state. In one case it was 2% and in the other 5%, and that the rates charged were not uniform. The railroad commissioners changed the rate and made the rate nineteen cents per 100 miles for a gallon can of cream, instead of twenty-five cents, the former rate. This will build up the creameries all over the state, and will help the towns where creameries are located and the farmers surrounding the towns.

When the Railroads wished to raise the interstate rates 15% the Railroad Commission called upon the Attorney General's office to help. President Aandahl, Mr. Little, the rate expert, and the Attorney General went direct to Washington. There they joined men like Clifford Thorne and representatives from only six other states, and did what they could to prevent the increase, - and, gentlemen, that increase, based on the 1915 crop of wheat, would have meant millions of dollars additional outlay for the farmers in freight rates. The State Administration is entitled to its share of the credit for winning the fight!

We hear a great deal about the members of the Non-partisan League being obliged to pay \$16.00 per year dues, that this is paid to Townley "to be told how to vote", but I submit to you, gentlemen, and I am willing to put it to vote, while you are here now, whether it is not worth \$16.00 a year to every farmer in North Dakota to have such a man as E. F. Ladd retained as President of the Agriculture College, and to have J. A. McGovern as active head of the grain grading department, and in fact have not every one of the men here saved ten times that amount by having those men in charge?

It was The State Administration, chiefly, through Assistant Attorney General Brennan's brilliant work, that saved the Board of Regents; it made possible the retention of President Ladd, the hiring of Mc. McGovern, and made possible the return of Professor Randlett, and kept our competent Pure Seed Expert Bolly with us.

The State Administration believes that when oil is sold to the people of this state it should be pure oil. That when a traveling man or citizen goes to a hotel and pays a price

for a room, that room should be minus vermin, and that the bed should have clean sheets, and so Mr. Ladd has been made State Oil Inspector and State Hotel Inspector in addition to his other duties.

The State Administration is not afraid of centralizing authority, and we all know that Ladd is a man who get results.

For the first time in its history, North Dakota has compelled the elevator companies to pay the farmers more nearly that price for their wheat which the elevators and mills should pay. Do you believe that the D. Feed Wheat robbery, where, according to uncontradicted statistics, farmers sold wheat at 72¢, the minimum value of which was \$1.45, would have been possible under the present administration? The very reason that the corrupt Big Business interests hate Frazier and the rest of us fellows is because they know that we have made our choice between themselves and the common people, and by the common people I mean merchants, consumers and business men plus the man commonly known as the average North Dakota farmer.

Do you believe that your Equity Cooperative Packing Plant at Fargo would be a success under the old administration? You know that under their rule St. Paul and Minneapolis were being built up at the expense of North Dakota cities, and you also know that the present state administration has taken steps and has practically remedied that condition. Your Mr. Hoopman, Manager of the Equity Packing Company stated that you have sold \$950,000 worth of stock to build this plant. Do you believe for a moment that that would have been possible under the old regime? How long ago is it that the former Attorney General, Mr. Linde, brought

an action to declare the Equity Cooperative Exchange insolvent ?
Did you ever hear of him bringing an action to bar any old line
elevator for discriminating in the price of grain against a farmer
or a farmer's concern ?